

## Fostering Handbook



Welcome to Richmond Animal League's Foster Program. Our organization has been rescuing pets in the Central Virginia area since 1979. The majority of the animals that come through the door of Richmond Animal League are pulled from our local animal control partners. Many of them come to us in need of medical or behavioral care. We usually know very little about their past history. What we aim to do is find them the best home to make their future brighter than the past.

Thank you for joining our family. As a foster parent you will help us extend our physical walls and save more pets. For every pet in a foster home we have one more space for a pet. Fostering is a rewarding experience for both you and the pets.

# Fostering Handbook

## Fostering Expectations and Responsibilities

- To provide the necessities for the pet(s) in your care, such as safety, shelter, proper and positive handling, access to food and water, medical care as directed by RAL staff, socialization, mental and physical enrichment, and TLC
- To be reachable and responsive to communications from staff, as RAL remains the pet(s)' legal owner and primary guardian
- To communicate promptly any medical or behavioral changes or concerns that arise while in your care through the proper avenue
- To transport pet(s) to the shelter clinic ,and other locations as needed, for medical care
  - When your foster pet is due for routine service, staff will contact you to coordinate an appointment
  - In the event of an emergency, staff will direct you to the shelter or to an offsite emergency veterinary care facility where you will wait while they are seen
- To promote the pet for adoption once they are eligible to receive applications

If anyone in the home has a compromised immune system or has a major medical issue please consult with your primary healthcare provider to ensure fostering is right for you. If you have any physical limitations that could impact your ability to care for a specific size or type of pet, please let us know your preferences or comfort level so we can match the best pet for you.

It is best to keep new foster pets separate from your personal pets or the pets of family and friends for a minimum of two weeks which is the incubation period for many of the most common diseases.

We do recommend that your personally owned pets be up to date on all vaccinations to limit the risk of infection. If you have an immunocompromised pet (elderly, juvenile, etc), please consider asking your veterinarian if they think fostering is best for your family at this time.

**If you choose to introduce your foster to a privately owned pet, you accept the risk of transmission and treatment of any illness or diseases that may occur as a result of the interaction.**

Since our foster pets are not easily seen by the public, our website is extremely important for adopters to see our available pets. Our fosters are responsible for submitting photos and a short bio one week before the animal gets spayed or neutered. If your pet is already sterilized please submit photos and a bio within two weeks.

Most often our foster pets will remain in your care until they are adopted. If you need to return your foster pet for any reason please give our staff as much notice as possible to make necessary arrangements.

We are able to coordinate temporary foster switches for vacations or other planned trips as needed. **Do not give your foster pet(s) to anyone else without notifying staff. Please ensure that any temporary caregiver is familiar with and has access to the foster handbook and RAL's routine and emergency contact information.**

# Fostering Handbook

## FAQs

### Why do animals need foster care?

There are a variety of reasons:

If the shelter is at capacity, sending a pet into a foster home frees up valuable living space so that we are able to save more lives.

Some pets do not do well in the shelter and they need a place to decompress to show their best selves.

Young puppies and kittens don't yet have strong immune systems and need a safe place to grow healthy and strong.

A pet needs a comfortable place to recover from an illness or injury.

Longer term residents often need a break from the shelter.

Whatever the reason, these animals need some extra love and care before they can be adopted and providing a foster home for a few days, weeks, or months can be a lifesaving gift for an animal.

### Can I foster if I have pets of my own?

Yes! But please keep in mind there is always a risk of spreading illness between pets. All foster pets that are over 6 weeks old will be up to date on vaccines, dewormer and flea prevention before they leave the shelter. Of course, many pets will need booster vaccines (such as young puppies or kittens), and getting a general dewormer is not a guarantee that the pet does not have intestinal parasites! We recommend that your own pets are up to date on vaccinations and that you keep any foster pets separate from your personal pets for at least 14 days to reduce any potential health risks. Speak with your veterinarian if you have any concerns or questions. If you have questions about how to keep your foster pets separated, please ask us before you pick up your foster! We can give you some tips and ideas.

### How much of my time will fostering require?

The specific needs of each animal will determine how much time is involved. Newborn orphaned puppies and kittens, for instance, must be fed every few hours. A frightened animal who needs socialization or training will also require some extra time and patience. There is a pet for every lifestyle; just let us know what you are looking for or are able to handle and we will do our best to find the right pet for you!

### What are the costs associated with fostering?

We will provide crates, carriers, food, bowls, bedding, towels, toys, leash/collar, food, puppy pads, litter, and litter box/scooper. All medical costs (vaccines, preventatives, exams, etc) are covered by RAL as long as the service is pre-approved by an Operations' team staff member. You, the foster, will need to get paper towels and cleaning supplies. If you are planning to foster small kittens or puppies, we recommend you have a kitchen scale to monitor their weights. You will also be responsible for providing your own transportation to our shelter for pick up, booster appointments or any medical appointments. Our staff is not able to go to your home to pick up pets or provide any medical care in your home. Please familiarize yourself with any fees required by your landlord if you rent; RAL is unable to cover the cost of pet rent or security deposits.

# Fostering Handbook

## **Can I buy my own supplies?**

Purchases made for foster care are considered donations to Richmond Animal League and are tax-deductible. If you keep your receipts, we will be happy to issue you a tax donation letter. If you want to be reimbursed for a purchase, you must get prior approval from a staff member.

## **Do I need prior medical knowledge in order to foster?**

No, but you may be asked to give medication to your foster pet. You must be able to follow the medical instructions provided by staff. Very few of these medications are injections or require needles. If you are interested and comfortable learning, we welcome the opportunity to train! We also recommend that you really get to know your foster so you are able to pick up on any changes that may signal if your foster pet is sick or injured.

## **I am under 18, can I still foster?**

For legal and safety reasons, only individuals who are at least 18 can sign up as foster parents. Minors can help with the foster animals' in the home, but adults must be the primary caregivers. Talk with your parents to see if fostering will work for your whole family.

## **Can I request specific fosters or types of pets?**

We are always willing to work within your preferences and requirements but the more specific you are the harder it may be to find a foster that fits your request. We transfer pets in immediate need from animal control facilities, so we cannot guarantee what we will have or when we will get a certain kind of pet. Staff prioritized juveniles, long-termers, and pets with special medical or sociobehavioral needs. Please reach out to the Foster Manager if you are interested in a specific pet in our shelter - we are more than willing to see if they are eligible for foster placement and may be a good match for your home.

## **Will a foster pet have accidents or cause damage?**

We very rarely have histories of the pets when they arrive into RAL's care. Every pet will need time and support to learn appropriate boundaries, habits, and your household routines. Foster animals, like any other companion animal in your home, may ruin carpeting, drapes, clothing, and other valuable items if left attended or not given guidance on appropriate behaviors. Preparing your home and the area the animals will stay in by removing valuable items and providing enrichment items (toys, climbing towers for cats, etc.) can prevent most accidents, but not all of them. Providing cats, especially kittens, extra litter boxes in different areas and taking dogs out for frequent trips outside while a routine is established can help prevent soiling inside. Your Foster Manager can offer resources and tips for a variety of common training topics.

## **How often will I need to come to the shelter?**

This will depend on the needs of your foster pet. Young kittens and puppies or newer pets will need vaccine boosters every two weeks. If your pet has not been sterilized prior to you picking them up they will need to return for this. Often, the longer you have a pet, the less trips you will need to make. For medication and supply pickups (preventives, long term meds, supplies) we can often accommodate most work schedules and will not require your pet to be present.

# Fostering Handbook

## **What if my foster pets get sick?**

RAL will provide all needed medical care for fosters. You will be given emergency contact numbers in case any after-hours concerns should arise. Please let us know as soon as you notice something so we can intervene before something small becomes an emergency. All medical issues must be brought to an RAL staff member's attention before proceeding with any sort of treatment. You may not bring your foster pet to your personal vet, and all medical services must be pre-approved by shelter staff.

## **What if my foster is not working out?**

We do our best to ensure a good and safe foster match, however, there are times where unknown behaviors or other issues arise. Please contact the Operations team as soon as possible. Many times, problems can be solved by giving the animal time to decompress and adjust to your home, and making a few small changes (a different crate, pheromone diffuser, behavior tips, etc). Other times, an animal may simply not be a good fit for your home or lifestyle. The safety of our foster families, their own animals, and our foster pets are of the utmost importance. We may not have an immediate alternate foster home or space for the pet at our adoption center. We will work on moving your foster pet out as soon as possible and ask for your understanding and patience.

## **How long will I have my foster pets?**

We prefer that you commit to fostering your animal until an adoptive home is found. Unfortunately, we cannot predict how long this will take. It depends on the animal's age, temperament, looks, and the time of year. If you can only foster for a specific period of time, please be sure to share this with the staff member when we contact you about your foster. The average length of stay of a foster pet varies on the age of the pet. Having fun and creative bios, quality pictures, and sharing on social media can help expedite the adoption process.

## **What if I have to leave town or can no longer foster?**

If you need to return your foster pets to our care, you will need to contact us with as much notice as possible. We often do not have other fosters on immediate standby or empty space at the shelter. Therefore, we will need some time to arrange another home for your pets to go to. If you know of vacation dates in advance, please notify the Foster Manager as soon as possible.

## **I have two kittens that are very close. Can RAL require they be adopted together?**

We do not require littermates to stay together. We always recommend kittens get adopted in pairs and adopting littermates eliminates the need for introducing two new pets to each other. We often have adopters seeking pairs; to help them find your kitten pair, it is a good idea to include pictures of the kittens together and to highlight their love for each other in their bios.

## **Who is responsible for communicating with adopters?**

Our adoptions team is the primary point of contact for adopters and they will be the ones to screen, interview, and approve adoptions. We will ask you to meet the adopter to discuss your

## **Fostering Handbook**

foster pet to share the information and answer the questions only you know. Your observations and feedback about your pet and adopter can be very important when determining if the new home is a good match. Refer to the adoption staff if you have any questions.

**\*\*Under no circumstances should a foster pet be brought to an applicant's home for a meeting, and cats and kittens should never be transported to another location unnecessarily. The formal adoption will take place at the shelter. Foster pets are not to be given to an interested party until the adoption is official.\*\***

**\*\*Please do not give out any medical advice to potential adopters. All medical information should be relayed by RAL staff.\*\***

### **What if I fall in love and want to keep my foster(s)?**

We are delighted that you have potentially found a new family member and “foster fails” are pretty common in animal rescue. We do ask that you think about if you are making this decision based on how hard it is to let them go and consider the impact that this could have on your ability to foster (We will be sad to lose you!). As an adopter you may only be able to save one animal's life, but as a foster parent you have the potential to help dozens of animals.

After you have thoughtfully considered adopting your foster and wish to move forward please let a staff member know as soon as possible. Once they are spayed/neutered, foster pets are available for adoption at all times. All applications are processed in the order that they are received, therefore foster parents do not have “first rights” to their foster pets. If you are interested in adopting one of your fosters, please submit an adoption application as soon as possible.

### **How do I say goodbye when they are adopted?**

Saying goodbye to an animal you've fostered, even to a wonderful new home, can be difficult emotionally. Some people like to be there when the pet goes home with the new family and seeing how happy the new complete family is helps focus on the positive outcome and remind you that your hard work and dedication paid off and they have found a lovely new home. And as soon as you are up for it, we are always happy to find your next furry house guest! Remember adoption is the goal and you have saved a life.

# Fostering Handbook

## I just got my first foster... Now what?

### Name Them!

We have over two thousand animals come through our care each year and each one gets a new name when they arrive into our care to match their new journey. If we know a pet is destined for foster care, we will often try to let the foster name the pet. If the pet has already been named in our system we usually keep it but you are welcome to give them a nickname, or many! To prevent duplicate names and confusion, have fun when you name your foster! Jazz it up! Give them a last name. Give them a title. You don't have to call them by their "given name" all the time; this is just to help prevent confusion among staff and adopters. If you select a name that is the same as another pet in our care, we may ask you to rename them or add a second name. Most adopters will rename a pet when they adopt them so get a little whacky! Not much is off limits other than a name another pet has in our care at that time.

Names to avoid: Abby, Roxie, Charlie, Penny, Rosie, Dill, Luna, Daisy, Molly, Zeus, Oliver, Bella, Oreo, Tux, Leo, Misty, Lily, anything Harry Potter related ;)

# Fostering Handbook



## Cat Basics

### Safety Requirements

Your foster must be kept indoors at all times. If your foster cat seems very curious about going outside or is constantly at the door waiting for the right moment, please take extra precautions to ensure that he or she doesn't accidentally sneak out when you are coming or going. You can offer them mental stimulation and entertainment by opening a window with a screen, allowing them to get the sights and smell of the outdoors from the safety of your home. If you open a window, please sit with your foster to monitor they do not push out the screen or push their way out. If your personal cat has access to the outdoors, they cannot interact with your foster cat. You'll need to keep their living quarters separate.

Please do not let your foster cat ride loose in a car. Use a carrier at all times to transport your foster cat to and from appointments.

### Daily Routine

When you first take your foster cat home, go slow with introducing your pets to new people, places, and toys. Transitions are a stressful time for most cats so giving them time to decompress and settle in will allow them to become more comfortable with you. We understand that everyone's schedule can vary from week to week and day to day but it also helps to establish a general daily routine of feedings and play times.

Establishing a routine will allow you to find the baseline of your foster's appetite and energy level and also notice changes in these habits which can be a warning sign of a larger medical issue.

### Feeding

## Fostering Handbook

You will be sent home with the food your foster is currently eating. Unless your pet has a special diet all pets primarily eat dry Hill's Science Diet food. All young kittens should also be fed canned food to add extra calories to their diet. Our adult canned food is donated so we will do our best to send that with fosters who would wish to supplement part of their fosters diet but we cannot guarantee that we will have a consistent supply.

Please do not change their diet without discussing it with the Operations staff.

Feed your foster cat once or twice daily; the amount will be based on the age and weight of your foster cat. Make sure the cat always has access to fresh, clean water.

Ensure that your foster does not have access to house plants or human food as many are toxic to pets or can cause gastrointestinal upset (aka vomiting and diarrhea).

### Litter Boxes

Most cats have an instinctual urge to use the litter box. To help set them up for success ensure the litter box is placed in an easily accessible location that is in a quiet, low traffic spot. We do not recommend covered litter boxes as they trap odors in the box that can upset fastidious cats.

You can also prevent litter box issues by keeping the litter box as clean as possible. Scoop out each litter box at least once daily, and empty it completely to clean it every two weeks. When you clean the litter box, use a mild soap (such as dishwashing soap), not strong-smelling detergents or ammonia.

If your foster pet has been consistent about using the litter box but then habits change, please notify the Operations team as this is most often a sign of a medical concern.

If your foster is having accidents, here are some troubleshooting tips:

- Ensure the locations of the accidents are being cleaned thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner.

- If the cat is going in an area far away from the litter box, try adding an extra litter box in that area.

- If your pet is going next to or around the litter box:

  - Ensure it is cleaned frequently,

  - We are able to offer you different litter boxes and litters to see if there is an option they prefer.

### Grooming

Most cats are able to self groom and do not need much human intervention. Long haired cats, overweight cats, or pets that are ill may need some assistance. Please do not bathe your foster unless absolutely necessary as it can be very stressful for the cat. Brushing should be a pleasant experience so starting with a few minutes per session and working your way up to longer periods of time.

If you are comfortable with it, you can trim their nails. But please be careful because you can cause pain and bleeding if you trim the nails too short. You can set your foster up for success by desentizing

## Fostering Handbook

them to having their paws handled and while you are cuddling just begin gently handling their paws frequently.

### Mental Stimulation and Exercise

Because play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy, provide your foster cat with at least one or two play sessions per day. The length of the play sessions will vary, depending on the cat's age and health. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster cat prefers. Cat toys don't have to be fancy or expensive. Cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag or a box with holes cut in the sides. Cycling toys in and out every few days can help keep their interest up.

Don't leave your foster cat alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm to the cat, such as string toys, yarn, or feathers. Toys such as ping-pong balls and toilet paper tubes are safe.

Discourage your foster cat from play-biting your hands and feet. This is something that adopters may not find desirable.

### Children and Cats

We rarely have information on how a cat is around children, so it is always a good idea to teach your children the rules for respectful interactions with cats.

Always leave the foster cat alone when he/she is eating or sleeping. Some cats may nip or bite if bothered while eating or startled while sleeping.

Do not tease or rile up the foster cat.

Don't chase the foster cat around the house; it may scare them.

Pick up the foster cat only when an adult is there to help. Cats can become scared when picked up, and they sometimes scratch with their sharp nails, even though they don't mean to cause harm.

Be careful when opening and closing doors so as to not accidentally let the foster cat outside.

### Behavior

Many cats have gone through a lot of change and turmoil before coming to your home. All of these changes can cause or exacerbate concerning behaviors. Please notify staff if you notice any of the following and we can help provide early interventions before small things become bigger.

Over Grooming

Biting/Scratching at people

Hiding

# Fostering Handbook

Urinating/Defecating in inappropriate places

Destruction of furniture

Inappropriate scratching

Worrying behavior towards other animals in the home. (aggression, fear, playing to rough, etc)



## Dog Basics

### Safety requirements

Your foster dog must be kept primarily indoors with walks or time outside to relieve themselves and receive exercise. Please do not leave your foster dog outside unsupervised, even if there is a fenced yard. We ask that you supervise your foster dog when they are outside at all times to ensure that he doesn't escape or have any negative interactions with other people or animals. Your foster dog is only allowed to be off-leash in an enclosed backyard that is completely fenced in. They must remain on leash when walking, hiking, or visiting parks. Dog parks are not recommended. Puppies under six months old should not go to parks or stores where there is a high traffic of dogs as they are usually undervaccinated.

### Daily routine

When you first take your foster dog home, take care not to overwhelm them with too many new experiences all at once. Sometimes, too much stimulation can cause a dog to behave unexpectedly toward a person or animal. Dogs take comfort in having a routine they can count on so it is important to establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings, potty breaks, and walk times.

Having a set routine will give you a stronger sense of your foster and notice any changes that could indicate early diseases.

### Feeding

All of our pets are primarily fed Hill's Science Diet dry food. Our canned dog food is all donated so we will do our best to send that with fosters who would wish to supplement part of their fosters diet but we cannot guarantee that we will have a consistent supply.

Please do not change their diet without discussing it with the Operations staff.

# Fostering Handbook

Feed your foster dog once or twice daily; the amount will be based on the age and weight of your foster cat. Make sure the dog always has access to fresh, clean water.

Ensure that your foster does not have access to house plants or human food as many are toxic to pets or can cause gastrointestinal upset (aka vomiting and diarrhea).

You can give your foster dog treats of any kind (unless they have any known allergies); giving treats helps you and your foster dog to bond with each other. Most dogs like to chew on things, so try Kongs, Greenies, Nylabones, or Dentabones. Rawhides are the only exception, these should not be given to dogs at any time. Keep in mind, though, that not all dogs like to share, so only give these treats when your foster dog is confined to their own area.

## House-training

It's unlikely that your foster dog will be house-trained when you take them home. Most of the dogs in the foster program have lived in a shelter for a while, often with limited walks or chances to relieve themselves outside. At the very least, be prepared for an adjustment period until your foster dog gets used to your schedule.

Because a dog has a better chance of being adopted if they are house-trained, please help your foster dog to improve this skill. Take your foster dog outside to go potty multiple times per day (3-6 times daily, depending on age). Initially, you may need to take her out more frequently to establish where they should use the bathroom. It can help prevent accidents to keep them either in their crate or on the leash with you while in the house until everyone settles into a routine. Most dogs will give cues — such as standing near the door or sniffing the ground and walking in small circles — to indicate that they need to go out.

If your foster dog has an accident inside the house, don't discipline or punish her. It will only teach her to fear and mistrust you. Clean up all accidents with an enzymatic cleaner.

## Crate training

Crate training, done in a positive way, can be an effective component of house-training. A crate can be a safe place for your foster dog to have "down time" and can also limit their access to the entire house until they know the rules. A crate should never be used as a form of punishment and a dog should never be left in a crate for an extended period of time.

They should only associate good things with the crate, so start by putting treats and/or toys in the crate and encouraging them to go in. Some dogs warm up to the crate slowly. If they are afraid to go in, place a treat in the crate as far as they are willing to go. After they take the treat, place another treat a little farther back in the crate. Keep going until they are eating treats at the very back, then feed their next meal in the crate with the door open, so that they can walk in and out at will.

Crate training a fearful dog can take days, so be patient and encouraging. If a crate is properly introduced and used, your foster dog will happily enter and settle down.

Once a dog identifies this as their space, you should avoid entering it to pull items out while they are in there or other pets going into their crate as they may feel cornered and react fearfully.

## Mental stimulation and exercise

Depending on your foster dog's age and energy level, they should get at least two 30-minute play sessions or walks with you per day. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, rope toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster dog prefers. Remember to discourage the dog from playing with your hands, since mouthing won't be a desirable behavior to adopters.

# Fostering Handbook

You can also offer your foster dog a food puzzle or food dispensing toy for mental stimulation. You hide treats in the toy and the dog has to figure out how to get the treats out.

## Grooming

A clean and well-groomed dog is a much better house guest, so bathe your foster dog as needed and brush them regularly. If you are comfortable with it, you can trim their nails. But please be careful because you can cause pain and bleeding if you trim the nails too short. Please follow specific guidelines supplies to you in reference to bathing dogs after surgery.

## Children and dogs

We rarely have information on how a dog is around children, so it is always a good idea to teach your children the rules for respectful interactions with dogs.

Always leave a foster dog alone when they are eating, chewing, or sleeping. Some dogs may nip or bite if bothered while eating or startled while sleeping.

Do not take away a toy or prized possession from a foster dog.

Do not tease a foster dog.

Don't chase a foster dog around the house or run quickly around a foster dog; it may scare them.

Pick up all your toys. Some dogs may not be able to tell the difference between what is theirs and what belongs to the kids.

Do not allow young children to walk the foster dog because they may not be strong enough or experienced enough to handle encounters with other dogs or cats who cross their path.

## Behavior

Many dogs have gone through a lot of change and turmoil before arriving in your home. All of these changes can cause or exacerbate concerning behaviors. Please notify staff if you notice any of the following and we can help provide early interventions before small things become bigger.

Trouble housebreaking

Pulling on leash

Hiding, being fearful

Mouthiness

Excessive barking

Destruction of items when left alone

Growling at people or other pets

Trying to escape

Showing teeth

Reactivity or "aggression"

# Fostering Handbook



## Medical Information

Depending on your pet's medical needs, they may need to come in every few weeks for vaccines or recheck appointments. The Operations staff will reach out to you about scheduling these appointments.

If you are fostering a pet who is on medications, please make sure that they get all prescribed doses. Do not end medication early for any reason.

The Richmond Animal League is responsible for all of our pet's health and wellbeing, regardless of if they are in our shelter or a foster home. This means that our staff must authorize any and all treatments for pets.

If your foster pet needs medical care, please notify an Operations staff member. See the staff contact section for more on who to contact how and when.

If you choose to take your pet to a veterinarian without staff approval, you do so accepting responsibility for payment.

### What to Watch For

Please notify staff if you notice any of the following signs. We would rather know about things as soon as you notice them so we can intervene early and prevent an issue from worsening.

Also, we will often ask you for pictures or videos of whatever you are seeing so keep your phone handy when you see something!

General

Lethargy

Dehydration

## Fostering Handbook

Hiding More than Normal	Mouth	Scratching
Inappropriate Behaviors	Open Mouth Breathing	Over Grooming
Eyes	Drooling	Chewing
Clear Discharge	Gastrointestinal	Hairloss
Colored Discharge	Loss of Appetite	Shaking their Head
Swelling	Vomiting	Increased Frequency
Third Eyelid is Up	Diarrhea	Musculoskeletal
Cloudiness	Constipation	Limping
Nose	Urination	Broken Bones
Sneezing	Inappropriate Urination	Stiffness in Joints
Clear Discharge	Straining to urinate	Unsteadiness when
Colored Discharge	Frequent Urination	Walking
Congestion	Skin and Ears	
Coughing	Itching	

## Common Diseases

### Cats

**Upper Respiratory Infections:** Similar to the common cold, when a cat's immune system is stressed they are very susceptible to developing a URI. The most frequent signs are ocular(eye) and nasal discharge, congestion, and sneezing. These are often viral and we will offer supportive care like fluids and vaporizers to keep them comfortable but if there is a bacterial component (colored discharge) we will start antibiotics.

**Calicivirus:** A common viral infection that presents itself differently depending on the strain. Common signs include limping, fever, ulcer on the tongue, and URI signs. Treatment will focus on supporting care, including offering highly palatable foods, pain meds, and subcutaneous fluids.

**Intestinal Parasites:** We do not often know what our cats have been exposed to prior to coming into our care so everyone is treated with multiple dewormers on intake but often multiple courses or additional medications are needed depending on what parasites they have. Often these infections will present as poor weight gain or weight loss, diarrhea, and vomiting. Some feline parasites are hazards for human health as well so good hygiene is always important.

**Ear Mites:** Our cats often come in with these little hitchhikers and are all treated with a flea prevention that kills these parasites but it may take some time for the cat to work the debris out from deep in the ear. We will often clean the cat's ears at the time of surgery.

**Flea Allergy Dermatitis:** Many cats are allergic to fleas and although we keep everyone up to date on flea prevention they may arrive with some hairloss, a brittle coat, or some mild bumps. The treatment for this is a good diet and time.

## Fostering Handbook

**Dermatophytosis (Ringworm):** Although the name suggests otherwise, ringworm isn't caused by a worm at all—but a fungus that can infect the skin, hair and nails. Pets and humans are able to contract ringworm, though often those that are immunocompromised, younger, or older are most susceptible. This is most commonly presents as patchy, circular areas of hair loss with central red rings on the paws, face, ears, and tail. We treat this with topical and oral medications.

**Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD):** A majority of our older cats have some level of compromised kidney function. Once they are stabilized on a treatment plan they are often able to live full, wonderful years. The severity of their disease will dictate the medications needed. Mild cases may only need a special diet while worse cases will need medications and regular fluid administration.

**Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV):** FIV is a virus spread between cats primarily through deep bites. The largest threat to FIV-positive cats is secondary infections, such as bladder, skin, and upper respiratory infections. FIV cats who are in a stable home without aggressive behavior, can live alongside FIV negative cats. FIV is not contagious to dogs or humans.

RAL no longer tests for FIV. But you may still get a cat that has been previously tested that is a positive.

**Feline Leukemia (FeLV):** FeLV is a relatively new virus so we are constantly learning more about it. But this also means that we have a lot of unanswered questions about it. FeLV is a retrovirus (a virus that integrates itself into their DNA) that impacts the immune system and bone marrow of a cat. It is not a cancer. There is unfortunately no cure and secondary issues are managed as they occur. The progression and effects of this infection varies from cat to cat and we cannot predict how it will present in a cat.

### Dogs

**Heartworm:** These are parasitic worms spread by mosquitoes that live in the heart and pulmonary arteries of a dog. The treatment for this condition is fairly uncomfortable for the dog and they must be kept calm and quiet during the first few weeks after treatment to prevent the dead worms from breaking off and lodging in the lungs causing death. RAL will complete treatment of heartworms before a pet is adopted.

**Kennel Cough:** Kennel cough is a term loosely used to describe a multitude of viral respiratory infections that causes bronchitis. It is characterized by a harsh, hacking cough which most people describe as sounding like “something stuck in my dog's throat.” This bronchitis may be of brief duration and mild enough to warrant no treatment at all or it may progress requiring much more intervention. A dog with uncomplicated kennel cough will feel overall normal and have a healthy appetite, while a more severe case may have a fever, lethargy, and a poor appetite. RAL gives all dogs a bordatella vaccine on intake but that may not keep a dog from developing kennel cough if previously exposed.

## Fostering Handbook

**Ear Infections:** If your foster dog has irritated, swollen or red or pink ears that often have a foul odor, they may have an ear infection caused by an overgrowth of bacteria or yeast. This type of infection is more common in dogs who have very floppy ears. It is common for dogs that get water in their ears (bathing or swimming) or that have allergies.

**Demodex Mange:** Demodectic Mange is a parasite that takes advantage of a dog's stressed immune system by taking over the skin and causing hair loss. Demodex is treated with a single dose medication. Dogs with Demodex often need antibiotics for secondary skin infections. Since Demodex is not contagious, dogs can be walked and be around other dogs as normal.

**Dermatitis:** We often get dogs with skin infections. These can be caused by poor diets, environmental factors, or allergies. These are often treated with regular bathing and a combination of oral medications. If there is an allergic component, we will be able to treat secondary infections and limit the severity of flare ups.

**Lyme Disease:** An illness transmitted by ticks that can impact the joints and kidneys. Our test cannot tell us if the pet has an active infection or the antibodies from an old infection so we will always treat them with an antibiotic if they test positive.

**Ehrlichia:** A tick borne disease that can impact a dog's ability to clot. Our test cannot tell us if the pet has an active infection or the antibodies from an old infection so we will always treat them with an antibiotic if they test positive.

**Parvovirus:** Parvo is a virus that attacks the white blood cells and the lining of the digestive system. It causes dogs to not be able to absorb nutrients or liquids and makes them susceptible to other infections. Puppies are especially prone to it because they have an immature immune system. When dogs and puppies contract parvo, they often have bloody diarrhea, vomiting, and lethargy. Parvo is VERY contagious to unvaccinated dogs. If you think your puppy(s) have the symptoms of PARVO please contact right away. The sooner that we can start treatment the better our outcomes for puppies.

# Fostering Handbook

## Emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in an animal? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

Not breathing or labored breathing

Symptoms of parvovirus: bloody diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, high fever (above 103.5 degrees)

Signs of extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)

Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand

Unconsciousness or unable to wake up

Cold to the touch

Broken bones

Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on

A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied

Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours

If your foster pet displays any of these symptoms, please contact staff immediately! If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can text the Google Voice number and a staff member will follow up with you the next day.

## Animal-Human Bite Incidents

If you are bitten by your foster pet please do the following:

- If possible, separate yourself from the pet.
- If immediate danger has passed place the pet in a safe space (in a room alone, in a crate, etc)

# Fostering Handbook

- Clean the wound.

Immediately contact RAL to alert them that a bite has taken place. We will have you fill out an incident report that includes details of the bite. Please be honest and thorough. Be factual, try not to use emotional language when describing the incident. It will be better for the animal for us to have all of the information in detail of what happened. If the wound(s) breaks the skin causing bleeding we will be required to file a report with the local health department. The animal involved will be placed on a 10 day observation quarantine.

- Ciera Jenkins: Foster Manager 804-921-8187
- Larissa Lacubec: Shelter Veterinary Care Coordinator 804-971-5183

## Lost Foster Pet(s)

Accidents happen sometimes and pets get away from us. It is important to remain calm if your foster pet should go missing. Call the emergency contact list above and start following the steps below. Your emergency contact will give you additional instructions. The majority of our pets are microchipped before going into foster care and the information directs back to RAL if the pet should be picked up.

### Dogs

1. Do not chase the dog! They may think it is a game or be startled and move away.
2. If the pet is visible, sit down on the ground and see if the dog will come to you.
3. If the pet is not visible, walk around the area they were last seen, calling out while squeaking a squeaker toy or shaking a bag of treats.
4. Notify Kennel Director and Foster Manager.
5. Place a humane trap near an area the dog frequents or was last seen.
6. Contact Development Coordinator to make urgent posts on social media.
  - a. Encourage foster to post pet to neighborhood groups and personal social media accounts.
  - b. Consider cross posting to multiple local Lost and Found Facebook groups.
7. Place their bedding outside if able, if available.
8. Report a lost pet to the local Animal Control.
9. Consider making Lost Pet fliers and posting in the area.
10. Check traps twice daily and refresh food as needed.

### Cats

1. Do not chase the cat! They may be startled and run further away.
2. Notify Kennel Director and Foster Manager.
3. Place humane traps in multiple locations around the property.
  - a. Focus on the direction the cat was last seen going in.
4. Contact Development Coordinator to make urgent posts on social media.
  - a. Encourage foster to post pets to neighborhood groups and personal social media accounts.
  - b. Consider cross posting to multiple local Lost and Found Facebook groups.

## Fostering Handbook

5. Report a lost pet to the local Animal Control.
6. Consider making Lost Pet fliers and posting in the area.
7. Check traps twice daily and refresh food as needed.
8. Do not place litter box outside as this may attract predators that could scare away the cat.
9. Do not walk around with treats. Remain stationary as the pet may follow you further away from the place they got out.

## Surgery

All of our pets are sterilized prior to adoption. If your foster pet was not already sterilized prior to you picking them up, you will need to bring them in for their surgery.

Please do remember that our Clinic also performs surgeries for public clients and other rescues and they should not be the first contact for medical concerns.

### Before the Surgery

After you pick up your foster, the Operations team will notify the Clinic team of a target date for your foster.

The Clinic staff will schedule your foster as close to this date as possible but appointments are dependent on the clinic's surgery schedule and your availability.

The Clinic will contact you with a date and provide additional details regarding the appointment.

If this date does not work for you, they are willing to work with you to find alternative drop off and pick up times or a completely different day if needed.

If you need to reschedule your foster's appointment, please give the Clinic as much notice as possible.

To have surgery, a pet must be at least two pounds and two months old.

It is good to monitor your foster's weight (kitchen scales work well for kittens!) to ensure they will be able to have surgery and also to monitor for signs of other issues.

If your foster does not qualify for surgery for whatever reason, another appointment will be scheduled.

If you have a nursing mother, she should stay with her offspring to prevent engorgement of her mammary glands.

# Fostering Handbook

A week before your foster's appointment, please submit pictures and bios to [foster@ral.org](mailto:foster@ral.org). See the Adoptions section of the handbook for more information.

## Day of Surgery

No food or water after 6am.

Dogs over four months of age should not eat after midnight but water is okay until 6 am.

All cats and puppies four month of age or younger can have a small meal before 6 am the morning of surgery.

You do not have to fill out any paperwork but you will be asked for a brief update on your fosters.

Check in time begins at 8 am. It can take up to half-an-hour to check in everyone; please plan your morning accordingly. Pull around the building in a counterclockwise direction and take a parking space in front of the glass windows. If no space is available, remain in line. Do not exit your vehicle until you are asked to do so.

Dogs must arrive on leash.

Cats must be in a secure, clean carrier labelled with your last name and your foster's names. Kittens may come in one carrier but you may be sent home with additional ones depending on how they are feeling after surgery.

Check-out for dogs and cats is at 4:00PM. Please let us know as soon as possible if you need to arrange a late pick up.

## After Surgery

All pets are sent home with oral pain medication following surgery.

Unless otherwise noted, all sutures are under the skin and will dissolve. You will not need to come back for a recheck or suture removal. Your foster pet's incision was sealed with surgical glue.

Your foster will also have a small green tattoo near the incision site to mark that they have been sterilized.

### Normal

Your foster pet was under general anesthesia and will likely **be sleepy for the rest of the night.**

They may act differently. Particularly with cats, they **may seem agitated, wobbly, or jerky and aggressive towards littermates.**

**Slight swelling or bruising at the incision site is okay.** This is the body reacting to the suture and this will disappear as the sutures dissolve.

### Not Normal

**Pain** or discomfort.

**Blood, pus, or fluid** leaking from the incision site.

Panting or **labored breathing.**

Lack of appetite, vomiting, or difficulty urinating.

Lethargy (sleepiness) that lasts more than 24

# Fostering Handbook

## Do

Do keep your pet in a **quiet, warm area** to rest. Some cats may need a dark area to sleep off the remaining anesthesia.

Do offer a **small amount of food and water** later this evening.

Do remember that your foster is made available for adoption after their surgery.

Do **check the incision daily** for swelling, leakage (blood or pus), or bruising

Do keep your foster **as quiet as possible for the first seven days** to allow the incision to heal.

\*The Adoption process is still changing as the world changes with COVID. Most of our cat/kitten/puppies are virtual only meet and greets. Dogs can have an in person meet and greet request. You must contact the adoptions team to set up meet and greets that need to happen at the shelter for dogs only so that time and space can be made available.\*

## Adoptions

All applications are processed in the order that they are received. If you or someone you know are interested in adopting your foster pet, fill out an adoption application on our website immediately, and notify a staff member as soon as possible. Fosters do not have the right of refusal, so if you fail to notify RAL Adoptions Staff that you want to adopt, we will have to honor the application processed first.

## Pictures & Bio

Our pets in foster care have a huge advantage over our shelter pets when it comes to their adoptions. They have you! You know them better than anyone. You know their quirks, their favorite spot to be scratched, where they hide their toys, and all the cutest photos of them. We ask that you send us a few pictures to post to our website, but we also encourage you to post them on your social media and encourage your friends and family to share or adopt.

We will not make pets visible on the website without a minimum of one picture. To get your fosters on the website please send up to three photos to [foster@ral.org](mailto:foster@ral.org). Your email should include the name of your foster, their ARN (this can be found on your foster form), and a short bio.

The only way for pets in foster to be seen is on the website. Great photos of your foster pet in the home with a strong, catchy bio will help your foster pet shine and stand out to potential adopters.

Please send separate emails for each kitten to prevent pictures from getting confused.

## Don't

Don't let your foster **lick their incision site**. If your foster pet is licking their incision, we can provide you with a cone (Elizabethan collar).

Don't **give your pet a bath** or allow them to swim in water for 7-10 days after surgery.

Don't **attempt to clean or apply ointment to the incision**

## Fostering Handbook

A bio is just a few sentences telling the world about your foster. Include notes on their personality, energy level, favorite toys or activities, or how they do with other pets and people of all ages. We do reserve the right to edit bios for length and clarity.

### Phrase everything in a positive light!

Here are a couple of links for tips on good bios for pets.

<https://heartsspeak.org/getting-shelter-pets-noticed-with-better-bios/>

<https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/aspcapro-dog-bios-afh.pdf>

<https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/aspcapro-dog-descriptors-afh.pdf>

<https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/pet-profiles-how-write-adoptable-animal-bios>

Here are a few good examples:

### Dog

Indy -Mark/Caron Paniccia

Hi I'm Indy, and my foster dad says I'm sweet, reserved, friendly, playful, timid, an explorer, and a snoozler. I get along great with my foster sister who's taught me a lot, like what toys are, and how to sit for treats. I know how to sleep in my crate, go for a car ride, walk on a leash, and leave human food alone. I'll need someone who's gentle and patient, and who will take the time to build trust with me. It'd be great if they had a dog, so I could continue to work on my confidence. Would you like to meet me?

### Cat

The Sunbeam Kid -Crystal Kinspel

The Sunbeam Kitten is a sweet boy who loves to look out of windows, bask in the sun, and find new places to hide and explore. One thing he really enjoys is paper bags, he darts inside and makes a fort he defends against his sibling invaders! He's also very smart, being the first kitten to figure out how to use the catwalk and winning a couple of games of tag until his brothers finally figured out the trick. Soft and silky, I just love to stroke his fur and hear his very quiet purr. He enjoys attention on his terms, so while he loves to crawl into my lap for a snuggle he rarely stays if I pick him up and put him there myself. If you would like to see more videos and photos and this sweet playful boy, you can find them on our foster page...

Your three photos should ideally include a clear "headshot" picture to act as the first impression picture that will draw adopters into your pet's profile.

Tips:

# Fostering Handbook

<https://heartsspeak.org/10-tips-for-great-foster-pet-photos/>

Try holding a feather, treat, or a squeaky toy to get them to look at you and *maybe* hold still for a fraction of a second.

The other two photos can be of your foster just being cute! Ideally something that shows their personality. They can be playing, snuggling a littermate, napping in your arms, or whatever would tug at your heartstrings.

If you have two kittens that you think would be best adopted together this is the best place to highlight this! Send pictures of them snuggled together and talk about other things they do together. We unfortunately cannot require pets to be adopted together but we often have adopters looking for two kittens so guiding them to an existing pair is very helpful.

Some fosters will include seasonal props (such as pumpkins, holiday decor, etc.) or a very bright background to draw attention to their fosters.

## Application and Adoption's Process

### Available Pets

All of our current available pets are listed on our website for people to view and read bios. If you take home a pet that is already sterilized, that isn't under a medical or behavioral hold or some other reason that would keep them on hold, they are available to receive applications at any time. All of our applications are processed on a first come basis, meaning that we process the applications in the order that they are received.

We are still not doing in person meet and greets for the majority of our pets. Our adoptions team will reach out to you when your pet gets an application and give you the contact for the potential home. You will then reach out to that person(s) to set up a virtual meet and greet. Zoom, Facetime, Facebook or other video streaming service to help a family get to know your foster pet. Some in person exceptions may be made to certain pets but that all needs to be scheduled with our adoption team prior to set up.

### Unavailable Pets (Unsterilized, Underage, and Medical Holds)

Applications will not be accepted for these pets unless the applicant is the foster, or a personal friend/family member of the foster.

Applications cannot be submitted by ANY individual on any pet younger than 5 weeks of age.

For an application to be accepted on an unavailable pet, we require a written referral for that person from the foster

Referrals can be informal emails identifying the adopter, acknowledging your relationship to that person, and confirming your support of the adoption.

Once a pet is cleared for adoption (sterilization surgery or medical restriction lifted), the adoption must be processed within five days of the pet's release. This includes meeting the pet and finalizing the adoption contract.

# Fostering Handbook

## Adoptions FAQs

### **I am fostering a pet. Do I still need to fill out an application?**

Yes! We still need all the same paperwork so we keep everything hunkydory. Our application is a simple Google form that can be found on our website and filled out on any device.

### **Can we require two of my kittens to get adopted together?**

We do not typically label cats as “bonded” or require them to stay together. We do encourage all adopters to adopt pairs so they can entertain each other and provide social enrichment. Not everyone is in a place to take on a pair of kittens and we your foster could miss out on the perfect home if we require them to stay together.

### **My adopters are not responding to me. What should I do?**

Please let us know if you are having difficulty contacting an adopter. Our Adoptions team will follow up with any adopter that is nonresponsive; it could be something as small as a mistyped digit or they may have reconsidered adoption. Let us know as soon as possible though as your foster may have additional applications behind this adopter and we do not want to delay them finding their new home.

### **What do I do if an adopter asks me a question I do not know?**

We are here to answer their questions (and yours) so please direct them on to us! “I don’t know” or “Let me check on that” are never bad answers. Focus on what you know that we don’t - you know who your pet is. The big no-no is passing on medical advice to the potential adopter.

### **What if I don’t like an adopter?**

We understand that you have probably developed a close bond with your foster animal and want to make sure they go to the best home and we want to hear your concerns. If you have any apprehension about a potential adopter, even a person seeking a referral, please let a staff member know immediately. Your comments are all confidential.

### **An adopter is contacting me after adoption with concerns or needs to return the pet. What should I do?**

Our Kennel Director must approve all returns to our care so please direct any adopters contacting you back to the RAL staff. If your foster is returned for any reason we will often reach out to see if you are interested in fostering them again.

# Fostering Handbook

## Staff Contacts

We recommend adding these numbers to your phone so you always have them.

Please never hesitate to reach out to us! We are here to help and support you through this entire process.

### Operations Team

Operations Team      804.446.0076

This number is your primary contact for non-urgent questions, concerns, and needs. This number is monitored consistently Mondays-Fridays from 9a-7p, and Saturdays from 9a-3p, by multiple staff members who are working on any given day. For non-urgent communication, you can expect a reply by the end of the day, but often within a few hours. Outside of the hours above, staff will periodically check these messages and reply the next business day.

If there is an emergent situation please call any of the following staff members. Call down the line until someone picks up:

Isabelle Bennett, Foster Manager      804.980.0726

Ciera Jenkins, Kennel Director      804.921.8187

Larissa Jacubec, Shelter Vet Care Coordinator      804.980.0727

Please note that your Operations Team is on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. As such, we ask that fosters do their best to limit communication after the hours listed above to urgent matters only so that we can appropriately triage care.

# Fostering Handbook

## Adoptions Team

Our Adoptions Team is always ready to help with any questions or issues you have regarding the adoptions process. They operate with a staggered schedule so they share all methods of communication to prevent delays in the adoptions process.

Text                    804.446.0004

This is often the fastest way to get in contact with Adoptions Staff. This number does not receive calls. Please do not give this number out to adopters, or to the general public.

Phone                 804.379.0046

We often are not able to answer calls as they come in but we pull voicemails regularly and will return a call as soon as possible.

Email                 adopt@ral.org

## Foster Mentors

We have some foster families that have been doing this extensively for years and have a wealth of knowledge to share with new foster parents. You are more than welcome to contact one of the below members of our foster family for helpful information, tips and ticks and peer support. \*Please remember these are not your emergency medical contacts. see this list of staff members in the emergency medical section\*

Bonnie Brady - Puppies

[bbrady11@hotmail.com](mailto:bbrady11@hotmail.com)

- Puppy tips
- Basic home manners training before adoption
- Litters of puppies

Mark Panniccia -Adult Dogs

[paniccia.mark@gmail.com](mailto:paniccia.mark@gmail.com)

- Shy adult dogs

## **Fostering Handbook**

- Heartworm positive dogs
- Dog to dog meet and greets for adoption

### **Frequently Used Off-Site Vet Clinics**

#### **River Run Animal Hospital**

Weekdays Open 8am until 10pm  
Weekend Emergency Hours 8am-5pm  
1403 Anderson Hwy,  
Powhatan, VA 23139

#### **Virginia Veterinary Center: Specialties And Emergency**

Richmond Location  
Open 24/7/365  
3312 West Cary Street  
Richmond, VA 23221  
804.353.9000

Midlothian Location  
Open Mon-Fri, 6pm-8am

## **Fostering Handbook**

Sat-Sun, 24 hours  
2460 Colony Crossing Pl.  
Midlothian Va, 23112

### **Virginia Referral and Critical Care: Specialty and Emergency**

Open 24/7/365  
1596 Hockett Road,  
Manakin-Sabot, VA 23103

### **Animal Eye Care of Richmond**

2861 Huguenot Springs Road  
Midlothian Va, 23113

### **Blue Pearl Pet Hospital: Specialty and Emergency**

Open 24/7/365  
5918 W Broad St.  
Richmond, Va 23230